



Concept Article

Complementary and Alternative Medicines; A Conceptual Approach Towards Holistic Nursing

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Introduction

Florence Nightingale, who believed in care that focused on unity, wellness, and the interrelationship of human beings and their environment, is considered to be the first holistic nurse.

Holistic nursing is defined as "Nursing Practice that has healing the whole person as its goal" (American Holistic Nurses' Association, 1998, Description of Holistic Nursing). Holistic nursing is a specialty practice that draws on nursing knowledge, theories, expertise and intuition to guide nurses in becoming therapeutic partners with people in their care. This practice recognizes the totality of the human being - the interconnectedness of body, mind, emotion, spirit, social/cultural relationship, and environment.

The holistic nurse is an instrument of healing and a facilitator in the healing process. Holistic nurses honor each individual's subjective experience about health, health beliefs, and values.

Holistic nurses may integrate complementary/alternative modalities (CAM) into clinical practice to meet people's physiological, psychological, and spiritual needs. Doing so they do not negate the validity of conventional medical therapies, but serve to complement, broaden, and enrich the scope of nursing practice and to help individuals access their own healing potential.

The practice of holistic nursing requires nurses to integrate self-care, self-responsibility, spirituality, and reflection in their lives. This may lead the nurse to greater awareness of the interconnectedness with self, others, nature, and spirit. This awareness may further enhance the nurses understanding of all individuals and their relationships to the human and global community, and permits nurses to use this awareness to facilitate the healing process.

Holistic nursing is not necessarily something that you do: it is an attitude, a philosophy, and a way of being.

What is complementary and alternative medicine (CAM)?

Defining CAM is difficult, because the field is very broad and constantly changing. National Centre for Complimentary and Alternative Medicine (NCCAM) defines CAM as a group of diverse medical and health care systems, practices, and products that are not generally considered part of conventional medicine (also called Western or allopathic medicine) is medicine as practiced by holders of M.D. (medical doctor) and D.O. (doctor of osteopathic medicines) degrees and by allied health professionals, such as physical therapists, psychologists, and registered nurses. The boundaries between CAM and conventional medicine are not absolute, and specific CAM practices may, over time, become widely accepted.

"Complementary medicine" refers to use of CAM together with conventional medicine, such as using acupuncture in addition to usual care to help lessen pain. Most use of CAM by Americans is complementary. "Alternative medicine" refers to use of CAM in place of conventional medicine. "Integrative medicine" combines treatments from conventional medicine and CAM for which there is some high-quality evidence of safety and effectiveness. It is also called integrated medicine.

CAM practices are often grouped into broad categories, such as natural products, mind and body medicines, and manipulative and body-based practices. Although these categories are not formally defined, they are useful for discussing CAM practices. Some CAM practices may fit into more than one category.

Natural Products

This area of CAM includes use of a variety of herbal medicines (also known as botanicals), vitamins, minerals, and other "natural products." Many are sold over the counter as dietary supplements. CAM "natural products" also include probiotics live microorganisms (usually bacteria) that are similar to microorganisms normally found in the human digestive tract and that may have beneficial effects. Probiotics are available in foods (e.g., yogurts) or as dietary supplements. They are not the same thing as prebiotics, non-digestible food